

ON THE RIGHT ----- by William F. Buckley, Jr.

For Release Thursday, January 1, 1970, or thereafter.

A WISH FOR THE NEW YEAR

Of all wishes for the New Year none, obviously, do we feel more keenly than that the gory chapter of Vietnam should come to a tranquil, satisfactory end. Professor Robert Dahl, a well known political scientist from Yale University, writes now a letter to the New York Times, dissecting the House Resolution of a few weeks ago in favor of President Nixon's program on Vietnam. That Resolution, you will remember, backed the American effort in Vietnam until the people there are given the opportunity to choose their own government in internationally supervised free elections.

Oh ho, says Professor Dahl, however much we all approve as a matter of morals the principle of self-government, just how is it that we are prepared to fight a very bloody war to bring democracy to South Vietnam and not democracy to, say, North Vietnam? "Or Taiwan? Mainland China? Burma? Or, for that matter, Portugal, Spain, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, South Africa, and Egypt--to pick only a few examples." The professor, who one must suppose is good at counting, that being what much of political science consists in nowadays, advises us that "of nearly 150 nominally independent countries in the world, only in about two dozen do the people regularly exercise the right to free elections."

Now if Professor Dahl were other than he is, one might suppose that in humbly asking Mr. Nixon for clarification, he was making an honest request for information. In fact, Mr. Dahl has been gung-hoing for pull-out for several years, and is merely diverting himself, but in the process of doing so, he raises questions which puzzle and will puzzle a number of people. So, since Mr. Nixon is busy, I shall reply to Mr. Dahl.

1) It isn't free elections that we are fighting for in South Vietnam. "Free elections" has become a kind of shorthand for "resisting armed aggression by Communist forces in Southeast Asia to gobble up a country which would be otherwise independent." The "free elections" cant, however, has never really been a property of the hawks in America. It was more or less forced on them by the abstractionists of democracy whom, now, Professor Dahl derides.

It was Senator Robert Kennedy who went about the country proclaiming that if the South Vietnamese people wanted Communism, it was their right to have Communism. That inanity was never publicly challenged by Mr. Dahl in any letter to the New York Times. The trouble with it is, of course, twofold: a) One cannot vote for Communism of the kind we are experienced in without in effect declaring a kind of war against one's neighbors.

-MORE -

-MORE -

Communism is a militant aggressive faith. It does not matter that the boundaries of Communist countries may for an extensive period of time be static. The borders of China have not greatly moved over the past 20 years, but China's busy manufacture of hydrogen bombs and intercontinental missiles itself imposes a burden on the world community.

b) To say that a country has the "right" to vote itself into Communism is to say that political rights are higher than human rights, a doctrine one would think Mr. Dahl, the former head of the Political Science Association, would have taken an early opportunity to reject. You see, if a majority votes in Communism (which by the way has never been done except in the opera bouffe state of San Remo), it votes to take away the human rights of the minority. The United Nations is, granted, a silly institution on the whole, but when it sought to establish a Convention on Human Rights that lay outside the political reaches of governments of the world, it was saying, in effect, that no country had the right to vote itself into Communism.

So that, 2) although Congress used the formula that the South Vietnamese have the right to choose their own government, what Congress clearly intended to say was that the South Vietnamese have the right to assert their independence, and that the United States having by protocol extended the SEATO Treaty to South Vietnam, we have the obligation to help the South Vietnamese to assert that independence. If Mr. Dahl desires to question the advisability of the SEATO Treaty that certainly is his privilege, along with that of other dissenters. But since Mr. Dahl has said that he is in favor of self-government, then perhaps he will be satisfied to recall that the SEATO Treaty was endorsed by the people's representatives by a vote of 82 to 1, and that the Gulf of Tonkin resolution, empowering the President to put into effect the guarantees of that Treaty, was passed, in the House of Representatives, unanimously.

- END -